

Planetree Activities

Award Ceremony

The first Planetree awards ceremony was held on January 6 in Canandaigua. Planetree coffee mugs and seeds were awarded to: Medical VA Care Line staff members, **Kathy Main** and **Lynn Sherman**; **Deborah Yurek**, Geriatrics and Extended Care; **John Tripodi**, Behavioral Health; and **Patricia Lind**, Associate Director of Patient Care Services. These dedicated staffers are members of the Planetree Canandaigua Retreat Training Team and the Planetree Leadership Team. These awards signify the value that these Planetree team members have to Planetree and Network 2. Because of their hard work, Canandaigua remains "best practice" for Planetree integration in our Network.



Pictured left to right: Kathy Main, Lynn Sherman, Patricia Lind, Deborah Yurek, and John Tripodi.

Employees Take Tai Chi

VA Western New York Healthcare System at Buffalo and the Planetree Steering Committee completed the first employee tai chi class in December. The three month course was taught by a certified Taoist Tai Chi instructor and included the 108 movements of the tradition. Nine employees participated in this after work, in-house activity. Tai Chi has been shown to be an excellent form of exercise with many health-enhancing qualities.

Call Center Implementation

On Thursday, January 23 software that enables the Veterans Service Center (VSC) to capture billing related calls went live in the VISTA system. VSC staff members have been evaluating the application of the software in the mirror account, and have worked together to develop some recommendations for an improved product. This step is crucial to the Network and the VSC in terms of appropriate tracking of calls from our veterans regarding billing concerns.

On Monday, January 27 the VSC portion of the Call Center will go live. This means that calls that are identified by the incoming caller as being related to billing, eligibility, or general application/registration will be routed through the newly developed "virtual call center" in the VSC. The VSC telephone number for the Network is **1-888-923-9656**.

Russian Medical Staff Visit Albany

Submitted by Susan Morse

On December 18, **Dr. Roberta Miller**, Stratton VA Medical Center, Home Based Primary Care, Medical Director hosted a visiting entourage from Russia.

Visitors included three physicians from MEDEP Medical Center in Moscow. The group was interested in telemedicine applications in home care. Dr. Miller conducted an impressive live telemedicine visit with a complex patient.

Dr. Miller has had a successful telemedicine practice for several years and continues to expand the program to include more rural and complex care patients. She also incorporates telemedicine as part of her academic practice.

Awards and Recognition

- VA Western New York Healthcare System was highlighted for their success in access and timeliness for patients being seen for primary care in the November/December 2002 edition of *Vanguard*.
- **Faith Hoffman**, VA Western New York Health Care System, Women Veterans Program Manager will be delivering the 2003 commencement address for the University of Buffalo School of Social Work in May. This is Faith's 10th anniversary of graduation from the school. She was also nominated for the Good Housekeeping Award for Women in Government/Wyeth Award for Women's Health.
- **Kathy Prividera**, Stratton VA Medical Center has been appointed as Field Advisor to the National Women Veterans Health Program Office.
- Stratton VA Medical Center nurse, **Josephina Roldan** was awarded the Broughton Graduate Fellowship in Creative Applied Science through Sage Graduate School.

In Remembrance

VA Western New York Healthcare System at Buffalo, Senior Chaplain, **Donald C. Markham** died on Saturday, December 28 after a brief illness. Long prominent in Freemasonry, Rev. Markham was associated with more than 40 Masonic organizations. Rev. Markham also served as pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Cheektowaga and was a major in the New York Army National Guard. He is survived by his wife of 46 years, Helen Schafer Markham, a son and daughter, and two grandchildren.

Appointment

Dr. Burma Cavanagh joins the Bath VA Medical Center has a new provider in the domiciliary. She has a special interest in veterans and substance abuse issues.

Recruitment Referral Award

Interim Network Director, **Lawrence H. Flesh, MD** has implemented a new award program to increase employee referrals for vacant, hard-to-fill positions. In a recent email to all staff, Dr. Flesh states:

"In order to provide quality care to our veteran patients, it is imperative that VISN 2 continue to recruit highly qualified individuals to join our staff. Due to current and projected shortages in many health care related occupations, this is becoming a more difficult task.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce that we are launching a "Recruitment Referral Award" program network-wide to encourage and reward our employees for their efforts in actively recruiting candidates for "Hard to Fill" positions.

Employees will be recognized for their efforts with a Special Contribution Award of \$250 or \$500 when the applicant they have referred is successfully hired.

Each Medical Center Director in VISN 2 will be issuing a program announcement, outlining the procedures for the Recruitment Referral Award program and listing the "Hard to Fill" positions at their facility. These positions will be reviewed quarterly and amended to reflect changes in recruitment difficulty.

I encourage each of you to get involved in this new recruitment initiative. You are the most powerful recruitment force we have in VISN 2 and we need your help!"

Priority 8 Enrollment Suspended

Effective immediately, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony J. Principi has curtailed enrollment of Priority 8 veterans until September 30, 2003.

Even with a record budgetary increase for this year, the large number of higher-income, non-disabled veterans expected to seek VA care would prevent VA from focusing on its core constituency.

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs is required by law to make an annual enrollment decision, and his decision to suspend enrollment for new Priority Group 8 veterans preserves access to health care for its core constituency. This change does not effect currently enrolled veteran patients.